



Commission Clues

November 2005

News of the Montana Commission on Community Service

Service is a Habit of the Heart

Democracy is based upon the
conviction that there are
extraordinary possibilities in
ordinary people.

Harry Emerson Fosdick

Where to begin?! So much is happening with the Office of Community Service, our Commission and our AmeriCorps programs since last we wrote this newsletter that it's a challenge to keep this short and readable!

Governors Conference on Civic Engagement – Creating Community in the Rockies

With several changes in format and content, the Governors Conference came off with strong affirmation in Missoula Oct. 3.

Speakers, panels, fishbowls, and responders tackled a variety of topics united by the common thread of linking the national service community and the civil society in which we serve.

A town meeting led by Governor Schweitzer capped a challenging day of deliberation and conversation. Voices from the various forums were able to debrief with the Governor and give him the opportunity to draw connections to his broadly defined responsibilities as a leader for the state.

Two-hundred people attended from across Montana. Connections were made with a variety of Montana groups that deepen and enrich the seedbed of community: Leadership Montana, Montana Committee for the Humanities, Montana Consensus Council, Montana Heritage

Project, Center for the Rocky Mountain West were among those present.

National Service was well represented throughout the agenda, including a special luncheon presentation showcasing Montana's AmeriCorps*State program directors. Learn and Serve Montana, Senior Corps, VISTA, and Montana Campus Compact all participated and contributed in meaningful and substantive ways to the event.

Governors Awards for Civic Engagement – 2005 Winners

Governor Brian Schweitzer presented trophies and a check to the five honorees, chosen by a Committee of the Montana Commission.

Winners were selected in the categories of youth, adult, senior, organization, and National Service member, based upon their commitment to cultivating an ethic of service in their communities. In addition to the actual award, winners each received \$300 in cash for their achievements.

The 2005 winners are:

Youth: Monforton School 7th Grade Class, Bozeman (*The class carried out a civic research project on public safety and prepared informational materials for the public on the need for a new jail in Bozeman.*)

Adult: Jeanne Nitz, Billings (*Jeanne was a key player in building a residence for families of cancer patients undergoing treatment at medical facilities in Billings.*)

Senior: Lois Staves, Stevensville (*Lois, with her late husband, established and continues to help manage a "Clothes Closet" in Stevensville where families in need can get clothing and household items free of charge.*)

Organization: Valley Cruisers Car Club, Pablo (*Combining their love for classic cars and care for children and community, this group sponsors fundraisers and events that benefit agencies serving at risk and needy children in the Mission Valley.*)

National Service Member: Aaron Blair, White Sulphur Springs (*As a VISTA serving this small rural community, Aaron's service has helped bring about meaningful and enriching partnerships between the*

community's seniors in need and youth, to the benefit of the whole community.)

For photos of the 2005 honorees and Governor Brian Schweitzer, please click on this link:

<http://www.discoveringmontana.com/mcsn/grantsawards/govawardwin2005.asp>

MCC Heroes in Louisiana

(Courtesy of Jono McKinney)

On Tuesday, Oct. 4, Montana Conservation Corps deployed 18 members (1 crew each from Bozeman, Great Falls, and Helena) plus Bozeman Regional Supervisor, Tim Dwyer, to Louisiana to assist with recovery efforts.

MCC was able to have "boots on the ground" in Baton Rouge within five days of the initial request from the Corporation for National and Community Service-Federal Emergency Management Agency (CNCS/FEMA) disaster coordinator. That's a pretty remarkable response in my opinion. We were only the second AmeriCorps*State program to get involved in this immense effort.

MCC crew leaders and members wasted no time making themselves useful. On Day 1, after getting their FEMA orientation and a full round of shots, they rounded up sparse tools in the camp (4 shovels and a pick) and started digging needed drainage ditches around the large circus tents that house hundreds of people involved in the recovery effort. On Days 2-3, still with no progress in the vehicle/tools department, they opened the phone book, called the Food Bank and other agencies involved in organizing and distributing the thousands of donated items, and got themselves over to these agencies to offer their services. During these days, CNCS AmeriCorps Director, Rosie Mauk visited our crews. She was thoroughly impressed by the unmatched initiative and leadership exhibited. In fact, everyone at the FEMA Camp was noticing that Montana's MCC members were the ones stepping up.

Finally on Sunday, Tim worked out a transfer of our members from Baton Rouge to Slidell (the community that FEMA "forgot.") where our crews worked with the Christian Contractors on a massive project removing downed trees from houses (using a crane,) limbing and bucking all the downed timbers, tarping over roofs of damaged homes, and clearing driveways of debris so

that FEMA could park temporary trailers for the residents to use until their homes are habitable.

In addition to the challenges of managing these projects, our leaders have taken on the extra task of coordinating work efforts for an additional 52 NCCC members who, at the time, were stranded in Baton Rouge waiting for tools and materials. They commuted over to Slidell to work under the guidance of our MCC leaders. Managing all this has required our leaders to step into huge roles of managing the FEMA materials warehouse, coordinating with the over-stretched Christian Contractors staff, staying in touch with FEMA and CNCS folks, processing the paperwork and project assignments for close to 100 aid workers, managing and supervising crews, and much more.

I cannot say how proud and impressed I am of our members and leaders. They are really demonstrating the engaged citizenship, character, leadership, work ethic, and crew spirit that is everything we'd ever hope for from the MCC.

MCC Crews were all back from Louisiana by Oct. 23.



Photo by Kurt Wilson of The Missoulian. Reprinted with permission.

MCC Pitches In To Help With Warm Homes Montana

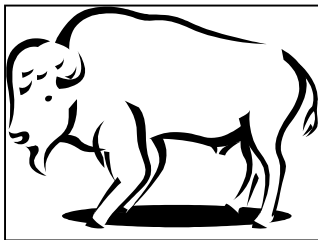
When Governor Brian Schweitzer was looking for ways to make an immediate impact to lower home heating bills for some of Montana's most vulnerable citizens, the Montana Conservation Corps stepped forward and quickly mobilized to fill the need. In a period between early October and mid-November, MCC members reached over 600 homes in 79 communities – including four Montana Indian reservations.

Activities included wrapping water heaters, caulking windows and installing plastic over windows, weather-stripping doors, installing energy efficient light bulbs, sealing holes in homes, installing carbon monoxide detectors, and providing education to homeowners. This has been a huge mobilization of MCC resources working in partnership with the local LIEAP (Low Income Energy Assistance Program) coordinators who've never worked on a effort of such scale with such short notice.

Priority recipients of the weatherization services have included our poorest citizens, seniors, people living in very rural places. Staff and corps members have responded very enthusiastically to this opportunity to make such a direct and positive impact in people's lives. It's also been a great chance for MCC to make such an immediate impact in one of our governor's priorities. MCC has already begun preliminary discussions to make this an annual mobilization.

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This kind note was received by the Great Falls crew that weatherized 40 homes on the Blackfeet and Rocky Boys Reservations:



The name of this card is "Riding with the White Buffalo." The white buffalo is a symbol of hope and renewal for humanity and for harmony between all peoples, all races. That symbol is the reason I chose this card. I want you to know I recognize your value and the value of what you are doing with your life right now by helping others. As in the belief regarding the white buffalo, I feel your work also is a symbol of hope and renewal for humanity and harmony between all people. (from Vicki Connelly, Director of the Blackfeet LIEAP)

Family Resource Centers Success!

In a recent participant survey conducted by Western Montana Literacy Support Corps on the effectiveness of its Family Resource Centers, 93.4% of respondents said that FRC's increased their awareness of school and/or community and

more importantly, 80.6% stated that the FRC's increased their participation in the school or community. And because of FRC's activities, 85% agreed that they now know more ways to encourage their child's learning at home.

Wise Words from Jeanne Moon

(Excerpted from Family Resource Centers Newsletter, Oct. 2005)

The challenges we face in our world today are very different from the ones of 100 years ago. Passive learning no longer prepares our children, or us, for the challenges of today and tomorrow. We must adapt, react well to change, and think independently. In today's world, the process of learning is as important as the result. We err when we place the task of teaching solely on subject experts – an impossible task in this age of so much information. Instead we need dedicated people to oversee the learning process. Context is critical to learning. Children and adults learn best by doing, and while doing, we need the opportunity to learn from our failures. ... We need to place our emphasis on teamwork, partnerships that recognize the value of each member. It takes us all – WORD, superintendents, principals, community agencies, AmeriCorps members, families, teachers, community members... to inspire in kids the love of learning.

Campus Corps Mentoring Programs Show Positive Impact

During the past school year, Campus Corps members worked with YWCA Child Advocates in Missoula (UM-Missoula), Child Advancement Project in Bozeman (MSU-Bozeman), Upward Bound in Butte (MT-Tech), and the Big Brothers Big Sisters program in Dillon (UM-Western). Surveys of mentees indicate positive changes. Here are some of the numbers:

- 73% report getting into trouble less often,
- 66% are more hopeful about the future,
- 53% go to school more regularly, and
- 66% better understand why education is important.

At the end of the Spring, a total of 288 mentors had worked with 628 youth mentees, giving 6,890 hours of mentoring activities.

Grandparents Raising Grandchildren

Between 1990 and 2000, the number of grandparents responsible for caring for their grandchildren increased by 53%. By early 2004, Montana ranked 9th in the nation for the increase in grandparents raising grandchildren. The main factor driving these statistics is methamphetamine according to Doug Andersen, a social worker supervisor in billings for Child and Family Services, a division of the state Dept. of Health and Human Services. (*Billings Gazette*, 11/2/2005)

Training 2005-2006 Update

By Shannon Stober

The Cross Stream Training Committee met on November 1 to conduct a final evaluation of the 2005 training calendar and begin planning for 2006. 2005 was an excellent year, with many training advancements and successes. The 2005 Community Building Institute (CBI) took on new dimensions, utilizing the talents of local practitioners to deliver the materials developed by Kansas University. The event was transformed into a workshop model in order to allow for smaller groups and more one-on-one time for members and supervisors. Feedback on CBI remains overwhelmingly positive. We hope to begin publicizing CBI in 2006 in an effort to draw in more community members and help sustain this program.

The June Program Director's training went well, with twenty AmeriCorps and twelve Senior Corps staff in attendance. The event was held at Fairmont Hot Springs and was facilitated by Judy Garrity. Although this year's program director's training was very successful, the Cross Stream Committee has opted to offer staff scholarships to attend the National Conference on Volunteering and Service (June 18-20 in Seattle) or the Montana Non-Profit Association's annual conference (September 24-27 in Helena).

The Annual All Member Gathering held on President's Day in Helena was an opportunity to showcase AmeriCorps to media and legislators. Members were given

training in the areas of citizenship and were deployed on a citywide walking food drive, which yielded over 4,000 pounds of food for the Helena Food Share. **This year's All Member Gathering will take place in Butte on February 20.** Mark your calendars; we hope to see you there!

Commission Clues is distributed bi-monthly by electronic mail and posted on the Commission website [www.mt.gov/mcsn]. Please feel free to forward, print or copy this newsletter!

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